

# MEAD'S TRAGIC ERROR SHATTERS THOSE WEMBLEY DREAMS

Report by **STUART EARP**

**Blyth S. 2, Wycombe W. 1**

JUST when most people had settled for a 1-1 draw in Saturday's match, Cup third round tie, Blyth Spartans mounted one more tired attack. Des Jardine and Keith Mead were some 30 yards out and running level towards the Wycombe centre back. Then, disaster struck for Wanderers. Mead tried to pass the ball back to his goalkeeper but to his horror it ballooned high in the air, sailed over John Maskell's head and landed right in the back of the net.

**STEVE PERRIN**  
... Blues scorer

Mead, hit out on the Craft Park turf, held his head in his hands in disbelief. It was a real travesty for the Wycombe centre back. Since he came to Lookes Park a few weeks ago, Keith has hardly put a toe wrong. And on Saturday the England centre back had held the Wanderers defence together for 90 minutes. But then, in one fatal second, the blue dreams of Wembley in the air, the final Amateur Cup competition, were shattered beyond repair.

It was not enough time to pull back again as they had in the first half and Blyth were too good a side to let the vital second goal slip from their grasp. It was all over — Blyth and Wycombe, who many thought possessed a side capable of taking the trophy this year, were out of the cup.

It was on the cards that an error would swing this pulsating game, but few would have denied Wycombe a draw and a second bite of the cherry at Lookes Park next Saturday. In extremely difficult conditions, every player gave 100 per cent and sometimes more.

As well as Mead's Trojan efforts, Dave Bullock, Roger Grant and Phil Wood all worked wonders on a quagmire of a pitch while goalkeeper John Maskell played 80 minutes of the match with a suspected broken finger.

In front, Steve Perrin and Dylan Evans used all their strength to forge their way through Blyth's unsteady defence while Tony Horsman, plainer deeper than usual, worked far harder than of late. But it

was in the midfield mud that the match was really decided.

Here, Wycombe struggled. Mick Halford, when not pressing forward, was usually right back to help his defence while Terry Reardon got so involved with his personal battle against Eddie Alder that he eventually had his name taken. So it was left to Larry Pritchard to try and salvage something. The odds were sometimes 1-1 and despite some occasional flashes of brilliance, they were stacked against him.

Blyth, along with Hendon, were the best side Wycombe had come against this season. Unlike Evesham, beaten 3-0 by Wycombe in the last round, they relied on skill rather than physical disruption and generally looked a good enough outfit to lift the cup this time.

Their long sweeping passes from midfield to either flanks, put immeasurable pressure on the Wycombe defence while centre-forward Brian Slane,

deceptively agile and with a long stride, gave them several anxious moments. It was Slane who laid off the raking passes from the wings while Jardine and Mick Dagless always looked menacing.

But Blyth were not without weakness. Their defence looked shaky when under pressure and at times had no answer to Wanderers' slick passing and speed.

In the early stages the visitors looked nervous and mistakes on the slippery surface were commonplace. Maskell was kept busy with a string of hasty back passes and then Blyth maintained the pressure with two quick corners.

From the second, however, Blyth were caught by a lightning Wycombe raid. Evans put Perrin clear of a stretched defence but Steve's punting shot curled just past the post. It was only a minor lapse in Blyth's concentration, for they sternered back with a string of attacks that

eventually led to the opening goal.

Balding skipper Eddie Alder worked a great one-two with Slane and ran unchallenged deep into the Wycombe box. Maskell came out bravely but in grabbing the ball off Alder's feet, injured his hand. The Blyth pressure continued. Full backs Gordon Atkinson and Gordon Smith overlapped regularly and created the extra man which Wycombe failed to pick up. Then, in the 15th minute, the visitor's defence cracked.

Blyth won a corner on the left which Mick Dagless drove into the box. Maskell seemed to have the ball covered but then dropped it right at the feet of Slane. The big man poked in one shot which struck a defender on the line, the ball bouncing out again for the centre-forward to prod home.

After the breakthrough, Spartans continued to produce some fine football. Wycombe were just not playing it tight enough

at the back and in the 20th minute it almost cost them dearly. Alder, the man who dominated the midfield exchanges, received the ball 30 yards out from goal and had time to look up, run five yards and measure a shot wide of the upright while Wycombe stood and watched.

Despite the early dominance upfront, Blyth were not looking so confident in defence and in the 22nd minute Pritchard went close with a looping header. Evans then sliced a shot wide to continue Wycombe's fight back which culminated in a superb equaliser after 23 minutes. The goal was an example of pure footballing skill.

It began inside the Wanderers' own half where Mead and Reardon played a cool 1-2 out of defence. The ball was passed to Horsman, who controlled and laid it off to Grant, springing up the wing.

With remarkable coolness, the full back checked, switched in-

side and crossed to the far post. Up went Evans with a well timed leap to nod the ball right into the path of Perrin who lashed the ball under Bob Varvill's desperate dive. Not one Blyth player touched the ball throughout the move.

The goal was just the tonic Wycombe needed to boost their confidence. For a while they continued to dictate events and began to look equally as dangerous as their opponents going forward. But Blyth were never far behind.

Taking free kicks quickly they seldom gave Wanderers a chance to settle and many of the visitors' clearances were hurried and fell straight to their opponents.

The action switched with real speed from end to end and after 40 minutes Horsman ghosted onto the scene with a flashing header from Reardon's clever free kick. "Bodgers' effort from a long way out, flew straight at 'keeper Varvill, however,

Blyth were quick to retaliate. Two raids in two minutes almost leap to nod the ball right into the path of Perrin who lashed the ball under Bob Varvill's desperate dive. Not one Blyth player touched the ball throughout the move.

If Spartans held the first half however, then the second half action belonged to Wycombe. After the break they came out searching for victory — and nearly found it. As Alder tired so the Blues began to capture mid-field and they won their first corner of the match in the 53rd minute. Nothing came from the flag kick but seconds afterwards Horsman and Evans combined to set to a chance for Halford. But he blazed the ball high over the top.

As Wycombe dominated, so the hope side became frustrated and gave away a string of free kicks. One home fan was so

upset with some of the decisions he walked onto the pitch to remonstrate with the referee — just one of several unpleasant crowd scenes. This particular youth was escorted out of the ground.

Wanderers were unperturbed. Passes were strung together well and at speed, but despite their well worked preparation, there were very few clear-cut opportunities to try for goal.

And Blyth were never out of action for long. On the hour Jardine almost put them ahead with a clever flick from Slane's back header. Soon afterwards Reardon disputed the referee's decision just once too often and became the first Wycombe player to be booked this season.

It was then Blyth's turn to surge back once more. The space was there again for them to exploit but still Wycombe managed to soak up the pressure. Wood, who started shakily, made a couple of brave clearances while Mead and Bullock coupled admirably with anything in the middle.

Pushing forward, Blyth began to leave gaps at the back and Evans and Perrin both went close with the latter shooting weakly at the 'keeper after a clever chip over the defence by Evans.

Then in the 79th minute, Reardon went down after a tackle. Substitute Paul Birdseye warmed up while Blyth sub Mike Park came on for Alder. Two weeks and seconds later, Wycombe were trailing 1-2 following that one fatal mistake. The question was, could Wycombe pull back again to salvage something out of the first?

They had just ten minutes to score again but the experienced Blyth team were not going to let it slip again. In the closing seconds Halford won a corner but Spartans thumped it clear and it was all over.

**BLYTH SPARTANS:** R. Varvill, G. Atkinson, J. Nixon, R. Scott, G. Smith, R. Halliwell, E. Alder, I. Smith, M. Park, 79th min. M. Lister, D. Jardine, B. Slane, M. Dagless.

**WYCOMBE:** J. Maskell, P. Wood, D. Grant, P. Mead, B. Grant, L. Pritchard, T. Reardon, I. Smith, P. Birdseye, 82 min. M. Halford, A. Horsman, D. Evans, S. Povey.

**Half time:** 1-1. **Goalscorers:** Blyth — Slane (15); Mead (40). Wycombe — Park (23).

**Official total attendance:** 1,900.



**TERRY REARDON**  
... booked

**KEITH MEAD**  
... Trojan coup goal